

## Briefing Statement

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**Bureau:** National Park Service  
**Issue:** Completion of the Foothills Parkway  
**Park Site:** Great Smoky Mountains National Park  
**Date:** September 19, 2007

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**Background:** Congress authorized the Foothills Parkway, as a scenic parkway on February 22, 1944 (Public Law 232). The stated purpose of the Parkway was to provide beautiful vistas of the Great Smoky Mountains along their northern flank (TN) and to disperse visitor traffic in the area. The entire 72-mile corridor is owned and administered by Great Smoky Mountains National Park, but only two discontinuous segments totaling 22.5 miles are completed and open.

The Parkway parallels the Park's northern boundary from Chilhowee Lake east to I-40 near Cosby. The completed segments are at opposite ends, 16.9 miles from Walland to Chilhowee Lake in Blount County and a 5.6-mile portion from Cosby (State Route 32) to I-40 in Cocke County.

In 1984 and 1985 two contracts were awarded to construct 16.1 miles of Parkway between Walland and U.S. 321 in Wears Valley. Both projects experienced such severe slides and erosion problems that work was suspended leaving a 1.6-mile "Missing Link" which lies entirely within Blount County, TN. A new design was developed to complete this last 1.6 miles using 10 bridges to minimize surface disturbance and environmental impacts.

The first two bridges were completed in June 2001 at a cost of \$12.8 million.

The third bridge contract was awarded in May 2005, in the amount of \$4.7 million for construction of a 220-foot bridge (bridge number 8) and about 50 feet of road that will connect to the two bridges that were completed in 2001. Construction on the third bridge began in July 2005 and is due for completion in October 2007. The three new bridges will span the first 1,675' of the west end of the 1.6 mile "Missing Link". The NPS and FHWA are finalizing plans to begin work in the late summer of 2008 on the east end of the "Missing Link" starting with construction of a 1,200' segment which includes a reinforced fill design to cross a shallow ravine.

Completion of the "Missing Link" will require a series of additional contracts, including a final contract for paving, guardrails, signs, etc., to allow the entire 16.1 miles from Walland to Wears Valley Road to be opened. Full completion of the "Missing Link" is expected to take 10 to 15 years and cost an estimated \$128 million.

**Current Status:** Under the SAFETEA –LU (Safe, Accountable, Flexible, and Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy of Users) Congressional add-ons for the "Missing Link" have been approved totaling \$17.7, of which \$15.2 million is available after Congressional reductions. The NPS and FHWA are preparing plans and specifications to begin work

In addition to the above funding, the Parkway could also receive funds from the NPS Park Roads and Parkways Program allocation (a small component of the SAFETEA-LU funding) which is currently planned at \$5 million per year for new parkway construction to be available either to the Smokies for the Foothills Parkway or to the Natchez Trace Parkway for construction of a multi-use trail.

Once the “Missing Link” of the Walland to Wears Valley segment is complete, there will still be three more unfinished segments totaling 33.5 miles between Wears Valley and Cosby, at a roughly estimated cost of \$370 million.

Approximately \$8.4 million remains from a 1991 Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act appropriation which was supported by former Congressman Quillen to begin work on the 14.1 mile section from Cosby to Pittman Center (Section 8-B). An Environmental Impact Statement is now underway on this section to determine the future development. Including the \$8.4 million, the total cost of Parkway Section 8-B is \$112 million.

The NPS is considering the addition of non-motorized trails to the 8-B EIS study alternatives, provided that the Tennessee Department of Transportation agrees to develop a plan for the future development of the parallel segment of U.S. 321 which will provide a parkway-like experience which is more harmonious with its scenic route along the Park’s northern boundary.

No funding has been appropriated for the Wears Valley to the Gatlinburg Spur segment (8-D) or the Spur to Pittman Center section (8-C).

**Interested Parties/Interests:** Leadership of neighboring Tennessee communities and the Tennessee Congressional delegation support completion of the Parkway.

**Next Steps/Strategy:** The NPS supports completion of the Walland to Wears Valley segment as its top priority. Beyond that, the Service plans to continue to seek funding to complete the Parkway, provided environmental impacts can be adequately mitigated and sufficient base funding can be allocated to patrol and maintain the completed highway.

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**Congressional District: TN-1 & 2**

Representative David Davis, John Duncan, Jr.

Senator Lamar Alexander

Senator Bob Corker

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